

**National Socio Economic Development Plan (2006-2010)
Mid-Term Review**

Discussion Paper for the UXO Sector

1. Progress towards the National Socio Economic Development Plan (NSEDP) Target and Strategies

The National Strategic Plan for the UXO Sector (2003 to 2013), 'the Safe Path Forward' sets target and strategies for the sector, and the NSEDP makes reference to the Strategic Plan. The objectives of the Strategic Plan are:

- a. Community Awareness: "UXO/Mine Risk Education (MRE) teams will visit and deliver MRE training to all impacted communities in Lao PDR (as identified in the 1997 National Impact Survey), and UXO/mine accidents will be reduced to a national accident rate not exceeding 100 persons/year";
- b. Survey and Clearance: "All agricultural areas considered to be 'high priority' will be cleared, as well as a sizeable portion of other areas identified as 'medium priority' – for a total of no less than 18,000 hectares (180 square km) of land cleared by UXO Lao alone";
- c. Victim Assistance: "A national database on Mine/UXO accidents (covering all 18 provinces) will be developed and updated regularly, to feed into the prioritisation of clearance and MRE tasks. The specific needs of survivors of UXO/mine accidents, in terms of both physical rehabilitation and socio-economic integration, will be factored in all national/local public health initiatives";

Progress towards these objectives was found to be as follows:

- a. UXO Lao alone has conducted community awareness activities in 6,659 villages over the last ten years and that other operators also conduct risk education activities. Although there has not been any check off process to ensure that the villages where community awareness activities are conducted are indeed on the list of impacted villages, it is likely that community awareness activities have reached the 2,861 villages identified in the National Impact Survey of 1997.
- b. UXO Lao's area clearance target between 2003-2006 was 5,542 hectare and actual clearance during the period was 5,798 hectare. At current rates of clearance, the target will be achieved by the end of 2013, although there have been no records kept in regard to the distribution of high and medium priority.
- c. The work to develop a national database and data collection system on UXO accidents are underway at the NRA Office. The expected date for completion of the backlog of data entry is December 2008 at which time the database will be up to date and fully operational. However, preliminary analysis of data that has already been entered suggests that UXO victims in the past decade have averaged 300 per annum. The initial target set was based on unreliable data and was unrealistic. The needs of survivors of UXO accidents are incorporated into national and local public health, social welfare and vocational education initiatives in a sense that UXO survivors are not discriminated against victims on the basis of cause of accident in the provision of health and social services. However, needs of survivors or people with disabilities in general for that matter, are far from being sufficiently addressed and met.

2. Discussion Points

2.1. Challenges and Constraints

UXO Accidents and Community Awareness/Risk Education

As mentioned above, there have been a number of community awareness/risk education activities implemented by UXO Lao and other operators. However, the preliminary analysis of data collected through the new system suggests that the number of UXO victims is triple than what was reported/recorded in the past and has not been declining. It

seems that more accidents are occurring because people go and intentionally take risks, rather than because people do not have basic knowledge of UXO and its risks.

Risk Taking Behaviours

A) Scrap Metal Collection

The scrap metal trade is a central area of "intentional interaction with UXO". There has been no comprehensive study of the scrap metal trade to date, but there has been more and more general understanding that scrap metal collection is closely associated with UXO accidents particularly among children who often participate in scrap collection. Preliminary data gathered by UNIDO from a large scrap metal dealer includes the following;

- There are 16 foundries in Laos that process scrap metal. Re-enforcing bar (rebar) for construction is a major product of these foundries. Fragments from bombs and other munitions are major components of scrap.
- Scrap processors often unwittingly take in UXO with scrap. Some factories will not accept UXO if they recognize them.
- The price of scrap at the village level has risen from 500 kip per kilogram in 2002 to 2200-2500 kip per kilogram today. At the factory gate, the price may be as high as 3800 kip per kilo.
- Scrap collection is well organized. Factories have networks of collectors and may provide metal detectors, transport and credit to collectors. Scrap collection occurs year round, but mainly during the dry season when farmers are not occupied with their crops and access to remote areas is easier.
- The conversion of scrap to rebar is highly profitable indicating that the demand for scrap is likely to continue to remain strong – as will the assumption of calculated risk of UXO accidents on the part of scrap collectors.

B) Expanded Land Use for Agriculture

Another area of "intentional interaction with UXO" is land clearing for agriculture development and the subsequent farming of the land. The land may be contaminated and may never have been cleared of UXO. Farmer contact with UXO may be incidental – when a farmer encounters a UXO during land clearing or cultivation - or intentional when the farmer decides to move a UXO that he has uncovered. Similarly, there were cases where when farmers burn brush on land being opened for agriculture, detonations of subsurface UXO under the fires occurred.

Therefore, it seems that there are limitations on what education or awareness raising do to change behaviors, especially when people are intentionally taking the risks. Scrap metal collection is a risky line of work, like many others, but on balance the rewards of immediate cash income outweigh the risks in the eyes of scrap collectors. There should be more efforts to develop targeted strategies for working with the scrap trade to reduce UXO accidents. Similarly, there should be targeted efforts to prevent accidents in the course of agricultural land clearing. The recent evaluation recommends the following;

- Expanded numbers of roving teams should first deal with the backlog of reported UXO.
- As part of the overall accident prevention theme, a public information campaign should be undertaken to encourage the reporting of UXO. Bottom up communications linkages need to be established from the village level to UXO roving teams. Village chiefs should be encouraged to use whatever communications channels are available to report dangerous items and the concerned roving team should respond within five days. The contact information for roving teams should be widely advertised.
- Roving teams should also develop partnerships with scrap metal dealers and collectors. These teams would provide 1) training and education on safe scrap handling and 2) rapid response when UXO are encountered in the course of scrap collection.
- Roving teams should provide rapid response when villagers encounter UXO in farming or other activities. The teams should respond immediately to destroy or remove these items to prevent children from playing with them or amateur attempts to defuse them.

There might be a need to reconsider provincial laws that restrict the scrap metal trade and brings it underground, and to advocate for the implementation of safe scrap handling strategies by UXO operators. There should also be a national regulation preventing children from participating in scrap metal collection.

UXO Clearance

There have been concerns with regard to the appropriateness of the targets provided by the Safe Path Forward. The main target established is for area clearance and roving tasks are not mentioned. As a result, it seems that there has been more focus on planning and managing area clearance and less emphasis on roving activities, which might be critical in addressing the problems of UXO accidents among the population of intentional risk takers.

Prioritization for area clearance is one of the key issues in the UXO sector. The Safe Path Forward makes reference to clearance of agricultural land, clearance of infrastructure, and clearance of other development projects. However there have not been clear measures to 'rank' or to 'prioritize' among these categories.

The recent evaluation suggests considering the following categories:

- Public development projects that are funded by international development organizations (e.g. the World Bank)
These tend to be larger development projects with an emphasis on development rather than directly on poverty reduction. Where it is thought necessary, UXO clearance is funded on a contractual basis. Work tends to be carried out by commercial UXO clearance agencies. A number of principles should be enshrined in suitable regulations to ensure the appropriate level of quality.
- Public development projects that are funded by resources available to the Province or District (such as, the Poverty Reduction Fund, the District Development Fund or Government resources)
These tend to be smaller development projects, with some emphasis on poverty reduction (though not targeted at individual households). UXO clearance tends to be made available on an *ad hoc* basis (or otherwise not done at all) by UXO Lao or NGOs, without any payment being made for the clearance services. Because of the current prioritization process, the development projects cannot be sure that they will get clearance support in a timely manner.
- Public clearance tasks that affect communities as a whole but that are not linked to development projects (e.g. the clearance of an existing school yard that is thought to be contaminated by UXO)
At present, such tasks are conducted by UXO Lao as part of their annual workplan or by the NGO in the areas where they work without payment. There is no potential to pay for such projects because there is no development funding attached, but the projects tend to affect larger numbers of people compared to the clearance of agricultural land.
- Clearance of private land for agricultural development by families or individuals, commensurate with their ability to develop and utilize it
The clearance of agricultural land has perhaps the largest direct relationship to poverty reduction strategies on behalf of the individual beneficiaries. However, it is not clear that the beneficiary households are always the 'poorest of the poor' as such people would be unlikely to own land, or be able to farm (additional) land.

With regards to geographical areas, UXO Lao, the National UXO Clearance Agency, and the major UXO clearance operator in Laos, only operates in the 9 most heavily impacted provinces at the moment. However the agency is now getting requests for clearance from other impacted provinces. It should consider starting operations in the other 5 impacted provinces i.e. Phongsali, Luang Namtha, Udomxay, Vientiane and Bolikhamxay.

Development agencies working in Laos should fully fund the costs of any necessary UXO clearance for development projects in their planning and budgeting processes. Funds could also be allocated to the Poverty Reduction Fund and the District Development Fund to allow them to fund their own clearance requirements. A government regulation that clearance must be undertaken in all contaminated concession or investment areas for purposes of public health and safety could be established.

2.2. Vientiane Declaration and the UXO Sector

Numerous Government offices including the Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and many provincial and district offices are actively participating in and making in-kind contributions to the UXO programme. Direct financial contributions have been somewhat limited.

The sector is well coordinated and programme-oriented under the mechanisms (working groups) that have been put in place, and UXO operators have aligned their activities with the national UXO strategy. However there is a room for improvement in terms of other development agencies fully integrating UXO issues into their plans.

2.3. Revision of the National Strategic Plan for the UXO Sector and Preparation for the Next NSEDP

The preparation of the next/revised National Strategic Plan for the UXO Sector would provide an opportunity to push the agenda on Vientiane Declaration forward. First and foremost, UXO activities should be integrated into the plans and strategies of next socio-economic development plan (2011-2015). In other words, the next UXO Strategic Plan should supersede the current plan and begin a new five-year planning period in 2011. The next plan would be incorporated into the next NSEDP.

Recommendations of the recent evaluation for the next UXO Strategic Plan as follows;

The main themes for the UXO sector should be 1) accident prevention and 2) UXO area clearance for development and poverty reduction. The plan should then take into account and cover these key aspects:

- The use of scoping results as the basis for planning
- The need for greater emphasis on roving tasks and responsiveness
- The need for development of a simple system of priority setting that addresses development and poverty reduction priorities
- The development of new types of targets, given the shift in emphasis to roving tasks
- An explanation of funding policies and mechanisms for the sector
- The definition of a handover strategy for the NRA and UXO Lao residual functions.

In addition, Community Awareness/Risk Education should increasingly target high risk groups, while on-going efforts to mainstream Community Awareness/Risk Education into the school curriculum should be maintained. As for victim assistance, certainly there should not be parallel systems/mechanisms to support survivors of UXO accidents and victims of other accidents. However, realizing that needs of people with disabilities are far from being met by existing health and social services, there seems to be a significant role for the UXO Sector to play in this area.